



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus Baucus, Co-Author of Landmark Medicare Reform Legislation, Hails Passage of Bill

This is a historic day. With the Senate passage of Medicare prescription drug legislation, we are moving closer toward the first significant reform of the Medicare program since its enactment in 1965. Most importantly, we will be providing America's seniors with access to affordable prescription drug coverage. This accomplishment has been a long time in coming.

I am honored to be the Ranking Member on a Committee that has a Chairman who is so committed to passing legislation in an open, even handed manner. Chairman Grassley and I remained in lockstep throughout this entire process. From the drafting of the bill to releasing the mark to Committee action and throughout two weeks of Senate floor negotiations. I could not be luckier to have as a chairman of my committee somebody with the quality, intelligence and the good character of the senator from Iowa.

Today's vote marks an important milestone in health care history. But it is just the beginning. There is much work left to do throughout conference with the House and even when the bill becomes effective. Each of us here today has a commitment to make sure this legislation will work on the ground as we've envisioned it on paper. The bill we've passed will set up an important framework. A framework that will allow our seniors to afford the prescription drugs they need to maintain a high quality of life. In the coming years, as more funds become available, I look forward to building upon this legislation and filling in some of the gaps.

A very important aspect of this Medicare legislation that both Chairman Grassley and I remained focused on was leveling the playing field for rural and urban seniors. Too often, seniors in rural parts of our country don't have access to the same level of care or benefits as their urban counterparts. This bill will ensure that rural seniors will always have access to a traditional Medicare government fallback if private plans don't exist in their areas. We'll also strengthen rural health care in other ways, such as making improvements to programs such as Critical Access Hospitals and equalizing reimbursement payments for rural and urban providers.

This bill isn't everything I would have liked it to be. But it's a good start and we must start somewhere. The passage of Medicare prescription drug legislation tonight means that we're one step closer to ensuring that our seniors never have to choose between food and medicine because of the high costs of prescription drugs.

As I optimistically stated many weeks ago, the stars are in alignment this year for passage of Medicare reform. With today's vote, I continue to be optimistic that the stars will remain aligned as we move toward enactment.